

Biography of Irma Ranney

by Anne Mary Ranney McBride

This biography appeared in "Our Line of the Ranney Family", an unpublished manuscript compiled by Carleton David Ranney, dated August 2001, dedicated to Anne Mary Ranney McBride, and with a copy provided "to Anne and all the surviving 1st cousins." A select 35 pages were provided to the compiler as well, to include this biography. Anne McBride [FGM # 134250010] was a younger sister of Irma Ranney and a graduate of Cotner College, NE as were all four of "the Ranney Girls". The Blackledge siblings visited Anne at her home in Hemet, California in summer of 2000, where she religiously exercised daily by walking around the filled-in small swimming pool at her fourplex, enjoyed library books brought to her weekly by her son David, and regularly typed letters to family members everywhere. Babs and Anne maintained a correspondence for years prior to Anne's death in January 2002. Anne's final letter to the family was designed to be sent to the family posthumously.

Irma Ranney, the seventh child of Albert Dayton and Catherine Wilson Ranney, was born on January 31, 1896, in Blue Hill Nebraska. Irma had mother's big brown eyes and dark brown hair, and developed into the most beautiful of the Ranney Girls.

We all had music lessons but Irma had a natural bent for music and could play many things by ear. She had a lovely touch and played all the popular music beautifully. She loved jewelry and pretty clothes, and always wanted to "to be in fashion." She always did her share and was helpful around the house in many ways. She had a more nervous temperament than the rest of us, and used to wring her hands during a storm that included thunder and lightning and gusting wind.

We moved to Red Cloud when she was in the second semester of the tenth grade. She was very pretty and caused quite a stir in the High School, causing many pangs of jealousy among the girls, for the most popular young man in High School was attracted to her. Irma was never forward, but always modest in her actions. She had a charming way of expressing herself no matter whom she was talking to.

Through the rest of High School she and Allan Blackledge paired off for all the parties, dances and picnics. It was a blow to her in her Senior year that she was not chosen to be the lead in the Senior Class Play, opposite Allan who was the leading man; the lead instead was given to the niece of the principal. They survived this and had many plans for the future

Allan had an appointment to the Naval Academy at Annapolis, and planned a naval career. Irma planned to go to Cotner University where she majored in English and History and planned to teach in High School until she was married. During this time they could see each other only on Holidays, and when Allen had summer leave. But those were treasured times, and with the letters that went back and forth between them, their romance never faltered. Allan used to write to me now and then while I was in High School, and I was very much enthralled with their romance.

Irma was popular in college and never lacked for dates. Many a young man pursed her, but though she was honest with them, they still wanted her company. Irma

graduated from college and got a High School teaching position, teaching in the English Department in Dorchester, Nebraska. Allan had one more year at the Naval Academy due to the fact he had gone to a preparatory school in the East, before entering the Naval Academy.

When Allan graduated she was allowed to go to his graduation with his parents, Judge and Mrs. Blackledge. The parents of the two had persuaded them to put off their marriage for another year, for Allan had contracted some debts for his graduation, that needed to be paid off and he would be on a Naval Cruise for most of his first year.

The plan was that Irma would teach a second year at Dorchester and the following June she and Allan would be married. Allan wanted to be married in the Chapel at the Naval Academy under the crossed swords of his classmates, and this plan was carried out on July 15, 1920.

It was planned that Pauline would go east with Irma and they would stay in the home of Dad's sister, Florence Ranney Saybolt and husband Walter and their two small daughters Anna May and Florence. The wedding party would leave from the Saybolt home for the short drive to the Academy. How I wished I could go and I'm sure dad and mother would have liked to go also. But that would have been a very expensive deal and the folks still had Don and I to educate and money saved for their old age.

However mother and I went with Pauline and Irma as far as Langdon, Iowa to visit the Gilliam family and also Carl for a few days before Irma and Pauline would go on to Baltimore. While we were there, there was a horrible storm, rain and near hurricane winds. Our Camper was overturned and damaged, and our clothes and luggage blown about. When dawn came, we went about collecting our wearing apparel from bushes and trees. They were soaking wet. Miraculously Irma's wedding dress and trousseau were in suitcases and were not damaged.

Pauline and Irma went East on schedule. After the wedding Uncle Walter Saybolt gave them a wedding gift of a night in the wedding suite of Baltimore's most fashionable Hotel. The photograph taken in their wedding clothes will confirm my belief that there never was a more beautiful and romantic couple than these two, Irma with her dark hair and big brown eyes, and Allan with his blond hair and blue-gray eyes, looking so handsome in his Naval Uniform.

Allan had his orders and was to be stationed on the coast of one of the southern states; I don't remember which one. I do remember Irma writing to mother each week, telling her about her efforts at housekeeping in their little apartment and what a terrible time they were having with cockroaches. Also asking mother how to cook this and that.

Of course they were stationed in many different places. Allan felt that airplanes were the coming thing and applied to be trained in the Naval Air Corps. His

application was accepted and they were stationed at Pensacola, Florida. This was where Barbara Pauline was born. It was also the end of Allan's Navy flying, for he was a victim of a crash that nearly killed him. I can't recall how many bones were broken, but after nearly a year in The Naval hospital, he was again ready for duty, but decided he would forget Navy flying and stick to the regular Navy.

The next tour of duty was in Annapolis as an instructor. I stopped to visit them on my trip home from China and a trip through Europe, and I saw baby Barbara for the first time. She was so lively and bright, Allan called her "leaping Tuna". They were so happy with her and their life was most pleasant. They had a colored maid and enjoyed the life at Annapolis very much, though Allan was studying very hard in preparation for taking the examination for 1st Lieutenant.

After this assignment they were stationed at Long Beach. If Allan was scheduled for sea duty for several months, this was when Irma and Babs would take a trip back to Nebraska to see mother and dad and Judge Blackledge (Allen's mother had developed severe Asthma and died on September 17, 1920). Or Irma and Babs would come in to Los Angeles to stay part of the time with the Gilhams, or Bill and I or out to San Fernando with the Wilmots.

One time when Irma and Barbara were visiting the folks at Red Cloud, when Babs was about three years old, she was quite fascinated with our big back yard. She loved the double swing, the vegetable garden, the apple tree and feeding the few chickens in their little pen. She liked watering the plants and flowers and was doing this when dad came home. He headed for the swing under the shady Maple tree, for it was a nice cool spot on a hot day. He called "hello" to Babs, which surprised her. She turned and the hose turned with her thoroughly wetting her Grandfather. When she came back to Los Angeles she told me her Grandpa Ranney didn't have to go to the market for his vegetables. He just dug them up in his backyard.

It was while they were in Long Beach that Allan had a change of orders and Allan was again assigned to Annapolis as an Instructor at the Naval Academy, and was given a month's leave to get there, this coincided with mother and dad's first trip to California. We had several gatherings and it was at my home that Allan, Irma and Babs came to say goodbye, for they were ready to start their trip by car to Annapolis. They planned to go to Red Cloud, and dad gave Irma a key to their house, to use while they were there. Irma said, "It will seem mighty funny to be there without you and mother too". Those were prophetic words for she would never see her home again. The first tragedy of our family struck when they were in about the center of Wyoming. The back wheels of their car locked, the car was turned over instantly killing Irma. Allan was knocked unconscious, covered with black and blue marks and wounds. Four year old Barbara was not hurt at all, and was found by passing motorists, running about trying to awaken her mother and dad. Allan and Babs were taken to a hospital in Laramie. The nurses were so good to Babs. They fixed her a little nursing cap and let her play nurse, taking care of her daddy.

When the message of the tragedy was received by Dr. Wilmot, it was decided that mother and dad would terminate their vacation and go to Laramie to take Irma's body, Babs and Allan home to Red Cloud, and that I should go too. For Babs knew me better than anyone, and it would be too much for the folks to handle alone. I think that train ride was the saddest experience of my life. As I write this 50 years later tears stop me.

The Doctor did not want to release Allan from the Hospital. He had no broken bones but was so bruised and lame he could hardly walk. We did get home and Allan was put to bed to recuperate. All the way on the train Babs was asking me if I would be her mother. I told her I would be her mother, and all of my sisters would be her mother and that she would always have a mother. A few days later she asked me where her mother was. I told her that when anyone was hurt so much that the doctors couldn't make her well that God took her up to heaven and made her well. She asked me when he took her and I said I didn't know but probably at night when we were asleep. We thought she was too young to attend the funeral and my answers deemed to satisfy her. The neighbors and the whole town were so good to us and helped in every way they could. To this day mother's P.E.O. Chapter puts flowers on Irma's grave there at Red Cloud in the Blackledge plot.

The Darners came down from Omaha and it was decided that the Darners would take Babs to live with them. That Allan, Babs and I would go back to Omaha with them where we would stay as long as Allan's leave would allow. This was done and Babs was happy with Edna's boys to play with. I stayed with her until she was at home at the Darners and thrilled that Edna was going to be her mother. She was willing for me to leave when I explained that Uncle Bill was waiting for me back in Los Angeles. That he was very lonesome and had no one to get his meals for him. Our careful care of Barbara at this time, and Dorothy's and Allan's care at a later time proved right in helping Babs to develop into a splendid, well balanced personality, a great combination of the best qualities of her mother and dad.

A year later Bill and I stopped to see Allan as we returned from a summer in Europe. We had a good visit and met many friends; some of them were attractive women who would have loved to marry Allan. But he was having a difficult time getting over Irma's death.

It was almost six years later when he was given duty in Japan that he met Dorothy Forrant. She was on her way to be a secretary in the American Consulate there. They fell in love and when Allan's tour of duty in Japan was over, they were married and returned home. After several months Barbara went to live with them, again in Annapolis. Dorothy was a very kind and understanding mother to Barbara and in due time, Barbara was happy to have twin babies arrive to be her sisters. When the twins were about one year old, Allan was stationed in Long Beach and we were again able to have visits from Barbara. Dorothy was most cordial to our family and co-operated with us in any way she could. In time they were transferred back to the East Coast where

two more children were born, Michael and Peter. Michael followed in his father's footsteps, having graduated from the Naval Academy and is making the Navy his career. Peter also attended the Naval Academy and now is in business.

During World War Two Allan was Captain of his ship, and was ready to go into Japanese waters when he visited us for two days, in Los Angeles. I took him out to Pasadena to see Dad who was staying with Clayton and Hazel after mother's recent death. He said Dad had a better grasp of the war situation than any civilian he had talked to did. At this time the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and changed the course of the War.

Allan retired from the Navy in 1950, with the rank of Captain. He located in Houston, Texas where Allan invested in the Cameron Iron Works and retired as Vice President in 1960. Dorothy attended Rice University, something she had always wanted to and graduated with honors. Dorothy had developed heart trouble and died suddenly while they were on vacation.

Allan sold their home and lived alone in a condominium near his daughter Patty and visited all of his children. Allan kept in touch with Edna and I through letters and visits on the telephone. He died in Dallas, Texas on December 11, 1982 following a lengthy recovery period from spinal surgery. Following memorial services in Houston, he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery; he was 86 years old.